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ADDRESS
TO THE
METHODISTS
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IN
BIRSTALL CIRCUIT.

By An Old Methodist.

LUKE xii. 57.

Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?

PRICE ONE PENNY.

(1797.)

METHODISTS



By An Old Methodist.

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TO THE
METHODISTS

IN

Birstall Circuit.

IN all public transactions, and with respect to all public characters, the judgments of any body of men, who may happen to be concerned in such transactions or with such characters, ought not to be formed too hastily, from any undue prejudice, or without giving the subject a fair and candid discussion; treating it with the consideration which it deserves. However it is too often the case, that what way soever the tide of popular opinion flows, whether right or wrong, many, very many, swim with the stream, never attempting to obtain any proper intelligence of the circumstances; but, either from ignorance or carelessness, suffer themselves to be carried away by the torrent; some, perhaps, for fear of the trouble and odium of opposing popular opinions; others, for fear of being considered as singular in their ideas, but most of all without any reason but a listless spirit. During a long and intimate acquaintance of near fifty years standing with you Methodists in Birstall circuit, I have seen very many instances of your being led in your judgments, intirely by the will of those whom you considered as your superiors, without

ever attending to the dictates of your own reason and judgment; and this does not proceed, in general, so much from a want of mental abilities, as from an unwillingness to exert those you have, which, for the most part, you have been too listless, and inattentive to exercise: this supineness has, of late years, increased to an amazing degree, and one instance of it, amongst many, is the ignorant prejudice some of you have against A——K—— without any inquiry into his case, and for no other reason under heaven, that I can hear of, but that Mr. H——d says, he is expelled the conference, and has published a wicked and seditious book. But let me ask you that are thus prejudiced, is Mr. H——d's saying so a proof of his being a bad man? Surely not; the scripture says, *Try all things, hold fast that which is good.* If I profess to be a Christian, I am not to judge any man wicked, till I have an undeniable proof of his wickedness. That Christian love, so much recommended by our Saviour,—that golden rule, of doing to others as we would they should do unto us, forbids me from condemning any person unheard, and especially a brother.—The fact is, A——K—— has known and experienced many things in the methodist connection, that are inconsistent with their religious professions; many things most scandalously defective in their transactions of money matters and their discipline. He has laid some of them open to public view, and recommended a reformation; and *who* pretends to doubt the necessity of reform in the methodist discipline and government? Why, none, but those who are interested in the continuation of the present abuses, and who are constantly reaping the profit of them. The *managers* of their public funds; those who are daily squandering in wild-

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goose schemes, the money earned by the hard labour of the poor simple methodist, who carries his penny a week to his class, and starves it out of the bellies of his hungry children; such as Dr. C—ke, who buys a piece of ground to build an opposition chapel upon, at Birstall, for 100l. and sells it again for 40l. or 50l.! Part of which 100l. he had begged of these very Birstall methodists whom he opposed; and at the same time is doing his best to assist those, who spend 2000l. in an unjust lawsuit in London; intending thereby to wrest the London chapel out of the hands of the trustees, and seize upon it for their own emolument. These are the persons who condemn A—— K—— and turn him out of their connection, because he endeavours to open the eyes of you methodists, to see and engage your attention to consider your own best interests, and the cause of religion! Amongst many other things, A. K. says, the preachers have too much power, that they recommend and bring into the connection improper persons as preachers. That they appoint whom they please as local preachers, without a proper knowledge of their abilities; of which the leaders in the circuit are the best judges. I would ask, do ye not all see the propriety of this remark, and have you not an instance of the impropriety of preachers appointing preachers, in the appointment of G. W—r, J. H—d, and J. Sc—d, in Birstall circuit? Men much better calculated to handle a shuttle, if they were willing to work, than to instruct you in spiritual matters. Mr. Kilham says, the preachers are not called to account, nor is there any possible means of bringing them to an exact account of what they do with the subscriptions entrusted to them. I am old enough, and so are some of you, to have seen *many* instances of their in-

accurate method of transacting their money matters. I remember I. O. making a love-feast, and collecting money for the poor, and making himself the poor. I likewise remember his great faddle-bags, almost big enough to hold himself, full of sugar, tea, bread, soap, cloth, and what not, which we all knew he came by very honestly.

Mr. Kilham says, that the fund for the old preachers is improperly managed, and the money unfairly distributed. I cannot say much upon that subject, only, I know the preachers have nothing to raise that fund from but what their hearers give them; and that the original intention of it was only to prevent the old preachers, who could not travel, from becoming burdensome to their respective parishes. It was never intended as a means of amassing wealth; and, if that is the case, what right had T. J——n to receive — per annum of that fund, when he has 100l. per annum of his own to live upon without it? But he is amazingly charitable; he sometimes gives 6 d. or 1 s. to a poor family, and has been known once to give 2 s. 6 d. altogether.

Mr Kilham complains, that the assistant preacher appoints whom he will for steward, or, in other words, that the steward is always the preacher's creature; which being a very honourable office, as high, or higher in dignity than a churchwarden, many of our pious methodists go after it with all the holy zeal imaginable, longing to be useful in managing and conducting the affairs of the church of God; so that very often ignorant or designing men are frequently put in by ignorant though well-meaning assistants, and the money matters of the different societies are not properly taken care of, but the money squandered away to little purpose. And we certainly have had a Solomon for steward

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these last eight or ten years in Birstall. His conduct is so dogmatical, and he exalts himself so much in his high office, that none of the trustees or leaders care to interfere with him, some for fear of disputes, and some for fear of being turned out of the society; the consequence is, the affairs of that TRUST are in a shameful state of neglect, both with respect to the application of the money, the payment of the interest money, and the means of paying off the old debt, which ought to have been paid off long since. Add to this, we are going to build a new dwelling-house, and to saddle the poor (for the Birstall methodists are all poor) with another annual expence of 100*l.* or 120*l.* per annum, by bringing them two families to maintain instead of one. I would ask, in the name of God, how dare you think of such an intolerable burden being laid upon us? when many of us can hardly keep our families from the workhouse, and starve ourselves to support those preachers we already have? If Mr. H——d was sufficiently acquainted with the circumstances of the Birstall societies, he has too much humanity to think of proposing such a scheme, as building another dwelling-house for another preacher and family. If he survey and consider the dwelling-houses of his hearers, their clothes, their bedding, their accommodations of any kind whatsoever; the very pictures of poverty and distress; their haggard visages worn with hard labour, and the want of almost every convenience of life; and lay his hand upon his heart, and ask himself how he could answer for it to God Almighty, if he attempted to bring additional burdens on those who are already distracted with doubts and cares how they may live.

I know his feelings so well, that I believe he would sooner die than be a means of adding to this

load of oppression; nay, even that spruce gentleman Mr. G—e, would blush at the absurdity (not to say wickedness) of the scheme, if he was well-informed of the circumstances. Is it a time to build elegant houses when we can with difficulty live? Do we not already go beyond our abilities to maintain those preachers we have? I know many families that are giving their pennys a week, their sixpences and shillings on quarter days, &c. and yet make many a dinner on potatoes and salt, many a breakfast on water cole; and all the rags on their backs are not, perhaps, worth half-a-crown, while their ghostly directors are well fed and well clothed, in a word, gentlemen in ease and affluence: and yet those are cajoled and made to believe, that they are supporting the cause. But my friends, always be just before you are generous. I am sure your money would be much better laid out in paying your debts to the neighbouring shopkeepers. How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and fools hate knowledge? How long will ye bring sacrifices and oblations, and neglect the weightier matters of JUSTICE, MERCY, and TRUTH? But to return; is there not proof enough at your own doors, of the necessity of the STEWARDS being chosen by the leaders and classes; and was A. Kilham to blame, in saying, the people ought to have more power respecting the management of their temporal affairs? You say, you do not wish to enter into any strife or contention, you wish to stick close to the Lord; but be assured that such cant is of small account in the eyes of God; and that wilful ignorance or a backwardness to rectify a dangerous evil, in a matter of this nature, where the welfare of a BROTHER, and the interests of a large and respectable Christian society are so nearly concerned, where

the means of information and redress are so ready at hand, becomes a fault, and a very serious one too, and will certainly subject the persons who are guilty of it, to a very disagreeable responsibility for all the evils consequent upon such a line of conduct.—See the case of Eli, 1 Sam. iii. 13. I might bring you numerous instances of the preachers abusing their power in placing and displacing leaders, were it not entering upon a larger scale than my proposed limits will admit.

Mr. Kilham says, the book-room at London produces nearly three thousand pounds annually; of the expenditure of which there is no account published by the preachers; and do you not know all this very well? yet we say nothing, though we are very sensible such accounts ought to be published. Many of us in this circuit buy the preachers' books and the magazines, as much with a view to assist the methodist cause, by way of gift, as for the sake of receiving any instruction from their contents, and consequently have an unquestionable right to know how that money, so given in charity, is expended. We ought to be informed whether it is spent in maintaining unjust law-suits in London; in ill-contrived missions to the West Indies; or in journeys of preachers and their families, in coaches from one end of the kingdom to the other: nay, I even think, we have a right to a vote in directing the expenditure; but if they deny us that, I think, they who do expend it ought to publish an account of the manner in which it is expended. Many regular hearers in Birstall circuit (though not joined with us in society) contribute pretty liberally to the support of the preachers; and though Joseph Drake calls them only the scaffolding to the methodist building, which will one day be taken down and

burnt, yet I know some of them who think themselves equal to any of J. Drake's corner stones; and who will take the liberty, till things are in a better train, to refrain from contributing to support men, who abuse them in so public a manner.

These, and many such like grievances in the methodist connection, A. Kilham in his publications has laid open; he complains of them; he recommends a reform in strong language; he says, they cause many to desert the methodists; and, if not remedied, will finally destroy the methodist cause; and for this he is judged unworthy of a place in the connection, by a few, suppose ten or twelve, designing, ambitious characters in the conference, to whom all the rest give way for the sake of peace, as they profess. But are these to be the sole rule and guide to all the different methodist societies throughout the three kingdoms? Are these, (a dozen headstrong violent men) to sway the judgments of one hundred thousand persons? Or have they a right to ruin the character and usefulness of a man who is labouring to open your eyes to the best interests of your common cause? God forbid! I call on you all, ye methodists in Birstall circuit, young and old, to bear your testimony against this most abominable tyranny. I charge you, by the religion you profess, and as you value your own souls, to do justice to the injured and oppressed. O how my heart melts when I reflect on the days that are past; I have been intimate with many worthy souls who are gone to rest, who would have spurned at the thought of being the tools of any ambitious faction. They employed their own reason in judging of such matters; laboured to support the just cause, and gloried in it. Would Jo. Charlesworth, John Nelson, John Wood, or John Tem-

pest, have behaved as we do? No; we are no methodists, but a mongrel breed. Our professions, indeed, are loud enough, but what are our actions? We are too much of the pharisaic spirit; we make long prayers, and loud enough too, but we forget the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and truth. I am aware some canting souls may cry out against this address, as stirring up strife, and disturbing the minds of the people; but I would ask such, is IGNORANCE any necessary qualification for heaven? Must not a man see and be convinced of his errors, before he can reform them? And is it not a bad cause that needs deceit and guile to cover and protect it?

Once more, I charge you, methodists, to hear and be just, to join hand and heart in a good cause, and God Almighty will bless and reward each of you in your own souls. I do not suppose he will encrease your chapels and preachers' dwelling-houses, and make you a rich and powerful body of people, it is not his method of rewarding. You shall have afflictions and distresses in this world; but he will give you peace in your own souls here, and life eternal in the world to come.

I have spent my life amongst you.—I am now near the end of my pilgrimage, and if any one thing in this world would give me pleasure or satisfaction, next to a certainty of my having an interest in Christ, it would be to see you, my brethren, act more like Christians: talk with less cant and more sincerity; fewer loud professions of faith and assurance, and more distrust of yourselves—which may God of his infinite mercy grant you all, for Christ's sake.

An Old Methodist.

P. S. It has been often and justly remarked, that every religious party, without exception, have been more pious, zealous, humble, and disinterested in their beginnings than afterwards; when they had formed their parties and settled their systems, it has generally happened, that the temptations attending HONOUR, POWER, EASE, and INTEREST, have been too powerful for poor frail humanity in its present state of weakness and degradation to cope with. Will not this remark apply to the methodists at present in a striking manner? Are the present preachers the same humble, zealous, laborious, disinterested, unassuming, plain men the first methodist preachers were? Are they not, for the most part, become fine, nice, delicate gentlemen, frequently afraid to walk or even ride a few miles on a dark, dirty, winter's evening, to preach to a congregation of their people, but will shuffle off the business, if possible, to a local speaker, who is quite inadequate to the task; thereby disappointing and disgusting their hearers, and discrediting their cause? Do they not assume more dignity and self-importance than formerly? and display a greater fondness for ease, honour, and power than the first preachers did? And will not the decay of real vital religion amongst them be infallibly proportionable to the foregoing circumstances? We wish not to abridge the preachers of all DUE respect and affection from their hearers; no, we wish to bear them all due reverence, and to esteem them highly, in love, for their work's sake; but we greatly desire they may avoid the common danger, and shun the fatal rock, upon which so many (once flourishing parties) have split before them; and the person who does this, can surely never be justly deemed an enemy to the methodist cause.

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